

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 619

CS 506 408

AUTHOR Kitao, S. Kathleen
TITLE The Group in Japan and the United States.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 29p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Communication Problems; *Cultural Differences;
Foreign Countries; *Group Behavior; *Group Dynamics;
*Group Structure; *Intercultural Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Japan; *United States

ABSTRACT

One of the most important differences between American and Japanese cultures is the difference in group interaction. The Japanese have been described as group-oriented and Americans as individualistic. In Japan, groups are hierarchical and usually make decisions by consensus. Japanese groups play an important role in the lives of their members, and the same group may serve several purposes. In contrast, American groups are less hierarchical, and decisions are usually made by voting or by an appointed person. Purposes of groups tend to be compartmentalized, i.e. each group serves only one main purpose. This paper offers an examination of various types of groups, including the family, clubs, the university, and the company, in order to bring details of their contrasting characteristics and interaction styles to light. Americans and Japanese working together in groups should learn as much as possible about each other's attitudes, values, and behaviors. Americans need to be more patient while the group arrives at a consensus, and Japanese should make an effort to express their own opinions during the discussion process. (Seventeen references are attached.) (SR)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED299619

THE GROUP IN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES

S. Kathleen Kitao
Department of English
Doshisha Women's College
Kyoto, Japan

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Kathleen Kitao

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

80490552

Abstract

There are a number of important differences between American and Japanese cultures. However, one of the most important is the difference in group interaction. Japanese have been described as group-oriented and Americans as individualistic. In Japan, groups are hierarchical and usually make decisions by consensus. Japanese groups play an important role in the lives of their members, and the same group may serve several purposes. In contrast, American groups are less hierarchical, and decisions are usually made by voting or by an appointed person. Purposes of groups tend to be compartmentalized, i.e., each group serves only one main purpose. In this paper, various types of groups are discussed, including the family, clubs, the university, and the company. Characteristics of American and Japanese groups are discussed, along with differences in their interaction styles. Also, problems that these differences are likely to cause are discussed and suggestions are made for Americans and Japanese working together in groups.

S. Kathleen Kitao

Introduction

When Japanese and American culture and communication styles are contrasted, a number of differences are commonly cited. Relationships in the United States are characterized as being horizontal (i.e., equalitarian) while relationships are described as vertical (i.e., hierarchical). Japanese people stress formality, while Americans like to be informal. Japanese people prefer to express themselves indirectly while Americans communicate their opinions directly. Americans admire eloquence in spoken language while the Japanese try to communicate through silence and distrust eloquence. However, if a single dimension of culture could be said to best characterize the differences between two cultures, that dimension for Japanese and Americans would probably be their group interaction and the part that the group plays in the social structure.

Group Orientation vs. Individualism

In comparing Japan with Europe, Hazama (1982: 53) writes that "In modern European society, the central social value is considered to be individualism. In Japan, however, the corresponding value that forms the nexus of society is groupism." Hazama's statement about individualism in Europe could apply equally well to the United States, if not more so. Reischauer (1977) describes the attitude toward the group as the most

significant difference between Japanese and American cultures. This difference is sometimes exaggerated--"The actual situations...are much less widely different than the American Lone Ranger myth, for example, or the traditional Japanese ideal of selfless merging with the group" (Reischauer, 1977: 127)--or used to oversimplify the situation and characterize differences between Japan and the United States along a single dimension (Cleaver, 1976). However, the ways that Japanese and Americans relate to the groups to which they belong, as well as the ways that they consider themselves in relation to the group, does say much about their characters and how they communicate. In addition, these differences often cause misunderstandings and poor communication between Americans and Japanese who work together in a group setting, or even when they communicate one-to-one.

According to Hazama (1982), if individualism is defined as "the dignity of the individual human being" or "the ultimate moral principle of the supreme and intrinsic value," groupism can be characterized as placing higher dignity on the group than on the individual. That is, group members feel morally obligated to devote themselves to the best interests of the groups, even if it means sacrificing their own.

Groups in Japan

The Family

Families in Japan are arranged hierarchically. The parents are at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the children in order of age. A Japanese does not refer to his/her siblings as simply "my brother" or "my sister;" the age relationship is also

stated, e.g., my younger brother or my older sister (Gibney, 1973).

The concept of family is somewhat different in Japan than it is in the United States. One Japanese word for family is ie, which denotes more than just the nuclear family, or even the extended family. The ie is the family line. It's meaning would be similar to the meaning of "The House of Windsor." Though this idea is not as central as it was before World War II, it still has importance. Most families keep a family altar in their home with the names that their ancestors were given after death and pictures of the ancestors, draped with black ribbon. Almost all parents hope for sons to continue the family line; if they do not have a son, they adopt one, often the husband of a daughter. This adopted son takes the family name, and the family line is continued through him. The oldest (or adopted) son inherits the family home and much of whatever wealth and property there is. Unless there are no sons, daughters are expected to marry and become members of other families; younger sons may start new family lines of their own, or remain in the family as part of the collateral line. Another word used for family is uchi, which also has the meaning "inside." This indicates the strict distinctions made between those who are inside the family and those who are not.

The University

The university as a group. Groups are a very important part of higher education. One group is the college or university itself. Most students do not attend more than one university, and links established during college education can affect a student throughout his/her career. Hiring practices are often

based on the college that one attended. Students who do well enough on entrance exams to be admitted to one of the top universities in the country are have a good chance of getting good positions in government and industry. In addition, university affiliation plays a part in promotion. The "old boy network" of a university is also useful to its graduates (Christopher, 1983).

Groups within the university. Within each university, groups are also very important. Students belong to clubs or "circles," based on their hobbies and interests, including sports clubs, art clubs, and volunteer clubs.

As in the family, there is a strong hierarchy within these clubs. Another group member is not simply another group member; he/she is a sempai [a senior] or kohai [a junior] or a dohai [an equal]. A Japanese uses these designations when referring to fellow group members (Gibney, 1975).

The Company

The company is another type of group. A Japanese worker is likely to identify him/herself in terms of the company he/she works for rather than according to the position held (Gibney, 1975). Many positions are based on "lifetime employment," so that workers will work for the same company for their entire working lives, though they may hold different positions in that company over the period of a career. As with a university, there are many groups within the company, including sports teams and groups that share certain interests, such as English language study or ham radio. Members of the same section also have strong cohesiveness. In Japan, the company is not only a place of employment; employees socialize with each other and the company

may provide help with personal problems.

Since companies do almost all of their hiring each year in March and April, and since almost all of the new employees would be new college graduates, there is a special relationship among employees who enter the company at the same time. Therefore, the relative number of years of service of employees is important in the structure of the hierarchy.

The Nation

The Japanese consider all Japanese to be part of one large group. It is a group that one belongs to by virtue of having been born Japanese. No one who is not of Japanese descent can join this group. Any non-Japanese, even one born in Japan, who has the ability to speak Japanese as a native speaker and who can follow all of the complex social rules that the Japanese share, cannot become part of the group. In fact, Japanese people have difficulty believing that Caucasians can learn Japanese at all. During World War II, the Japanese were so convinced of this that they barely bothered to code their secret messages (Christopher, 1983).

Conversely, it is hard for the Japanese to believe that any person ever leave that group. Second and third Japanese-Americans, many of whom speak little or no Japanese, face many special difficulties in Japan, because native Japanese expect anyone who looks like a Japanese to be able to speak and interact as another Japanese would. Japanese-Americans say that native Japanese often think that they are "showing off" when they speak English, or that they are either crazy or stupid when they do not understand Japanese.

The Japanese believe that Japan is unique--more unique than

any other culture. Because Japan is so unique, in their view, the Japanese have, as Gould (1972: 71) described,

an unshakable conviction that no non-Japanese can ever understand the nuances and intuitive perceptions of the Japanese. In many travels over many years in all parts of Japan, I have never met a Japanese who truly believes that the foreign mentality can share the Japanese experience or aspirations....It seems [to be] the Japanese perspective that experiences of Japan are by that fact alone totally different from the rest of the world.

Groups in the United States

The Family

The family is the most basic group in the United States. As in Japan, it is in the American family that children learn what their society expects of them and how to interact with others. In the American family, children learn to be independent from others. While it is difficult to make generalizations about American child-raising practices, one purpose of the family is usually considered to be the development of independent adults.

The American stress on the individual as a concrete point of reference begins at a very early age when the American child is encouraged to be autonomous. The self-centeredness of the child is seldom questioned. It is implicitly accepted that each child or person should be encouraged to decide for himself, develop his own opinions, solve his own problems, have his own things, and, in

general, learn to view the world from the point of view of the self (Stewart, 1972: 72).

From a fairly early age, children are given their own rooms if at all possible. They are given an allowance and/or expected to perform chores around the house in order to learn to be responsible for money. As teen-agers, they are gradually given more and more control over their decisions and activities. As adults, they may ask their parents for advice or help, but they are expected to make their own decisions and live with the consequences of those decisions (Stewart, 1979).

Birth order has little significance in a hierarchical sense, though obviously children at different places in the birth order may be treated differently. Especially once siblings become adults, birth order has little significance.

Though some parents may want sons in order to "carry on the family name," the family line does not have the importance in the United States that it does in Japan. Though there has been a resurgence of interest in tracing family trees since the mid-seventies, many Americans know little about their family histories beyond their grandparents.

There are no particular customs related to division of inheritance, though state laws may specify a certain amount or percentage of a parent's estate to be distributed to each child, preventing any one child from being completely disinherited. Generally, some effort is made to divide money and property equally among all the children.

The University

Universities in the United States are less group-oriented

than those in Japan. Graduation from a certain university does not play as great a role in hiring practices as do personal qualifications. Groups are also less important within the university. Many students do not belong to any clubs. In relationships among students, hierarchy is of little importance. While students may be aware of their relative academic levels, they are not especially important in a hierarchical sense.

The Company

In part because of Americans' attitudes toward independence, companies are less important as a group than in Japan. Americans generally see themselves as autonomous individuals who choose at one particular time to sell their skills to a particular company, but who are free to sell their skills to another company if they are dissatisfied with their present company or if a more enticing offer is made. Therefore, Americans will generally identify themselves in terms of their jobs first and their companies second (Gibney, 1975).

Within companies, groups are less important than they are in Japan. For example, companies do not have a particular "hiring season," so all new employees do not enter the company at the same time each year. Also, new employees are not all recent college graduates; many of them may have spent years working for other companies. Therefore, though employees may be honored for a certain number of years of service, the number of years that an individual has worked for a company does not necessarily play an important role in the hierarchy of the company, and an employee is not likely to have a special bond with people who entered the company at the same time.

American employees socialize relatively little with their

co-workers. They prefer to keep the group that they work with separate from the groups that they socialize with.

Characteristics of Japanese Groups

The above discussion of Japanese and American groups may give the reader some ideas of the characteristics of Japanese and American groups and how they differ. I would like to discuss those characteristics in more detail here. It should be kept in mind that these characteristics are not dichotomous; they are points on a continuum. For example, Japanese may be said to be group-oriented and Americans individualistic, but this does not mean that Americans do not care anything at all about groups or that Japanese do not hold any opinions of their own.

Stability

One characteristic of Japanese groups is their stability. It is not easy to get into a particular group, and, once in, it is not easy to get out. Students work hard, often from the time they are in grade school, to pass university entrance examinations. Once admitted to a university, most students graduate from that same university. Transferring to another university is rare. Also, though it is extremely difficult to be admitted to a university, it is relatively easy to graduate, so most undergraduates who enter a university do complete a bachelor's degree. Companies are also very careful about hiring new full time employees, since full time employees usually stay with a company for their entire working life, and it is difficult or impossible to fire someone. During that time, the company will spend a great deal of money training these employees. In

part because it is so difficult to enter a group, distinctions are made between those who are members of the group and those who are not. Different words are even used to refer to group members than are used to refer to people who are not group members.

Overlapping Purposes of Groups

A second characteristic of Japanese groups formed for one purpose may have other purposes as well. For example, a Japanese is likely to work and socialize with the same people. Members of one department in a company not only work together, they are also likely to go on trips together in the summer or form an athletic team. University club members also take trips together during vacations.

In a Japanese groups, group members all want to be alike (Harris, 1979). Members of a section in a company or students in a school wear uniforms that mark them as members of the group. All group members try to do the same thing and want to be treated alike. For example, rewards and recognition are given to groups rather than to individuals.

Harmony and Decision Making

In a Japanese group, all members work hard to maintain harmony. For a Japanese, harmony means unanimity of opinion, without any (openly expressed) disagreement. As a Japanese proverb says that the nail that sticks up is the one that will be hit. Group members do not want to "stand out" they try to play the role that is expected of them within the group instead of expressing their real feelings. They avoid disagreeing openly with other group members. They tend to wait until they are asked to speak. When they do speak, they do not give their own

opinions but suggest opinions representative of their position in the group or express their own opinions as if they were someone else's, using such indirect ways of expressing this disagreement as, "Many people say..." and "It is said..." so that they can express an opinion without actually stating that it is their own. They seldom express their "honne" [real intention] in public but instead express "tatemae" [facade of what one is expected to say, in a given position and role]. Honne and tatemae may be very different and sometimes even opposite. Thus, group members seldom disagree openly among themselves. They do not express their emotions and their true reactions. They try to do as they are supposed to do in a group. Even if they do not express themselves clearly, others can understand them because they have close relations among themselves. They set a high value on haragei [psychological interpretation in silence] and ishindenshin [telepathy] (Kindaichi, 1957). In discussing issues, group members try to find out the opinions of others before expressing their own so that the opinion they express will be in line with that of the other group members. Within the group, decisions are made by consensus through this process of "sounding out" opinions of other group members.

The Japanese is the world's committeeman par excellence. Their deliberations are time-consuming, wordy, and, to an outsider, consistently exasperating. But they generally end up with the kind of true consensus that is an envy to us all (Gibney, 1975).

However, this method of decision does have drawbacks. It is difficult for the group to change course once the decision has

been made, and minority opinion may tend to be suppressed (Katō, 1974).

The reason that the Japanese can communicate with each other in silence Japan is more homogeneous in terms of race, ethnic groups, and language than any country of similar size. This is convenient for communication between Japanese people (Kunihiro, 1972).

It is not only in a situation where it is necessary to disagree that Japanese people find it desirable to use indirection. In any situation where it is necessary to tell other group members something that they do not want to hear, the Japanese will try to use indirect methods. For example, the Japanese do not like to complain, but if it is necessary, they do it as indirectly as possible. In some cases, they will even state the opposite of what they are complaining about. In one case, a Japanese woman who wanted to complain that her neighbor's daughter was practicing the piano too late did so by commenting on how well the girl was doing, how diligent she was, and what long hours she practiced. The girl's mother understood the neighbor's intention and said that she would not let her daughter practice so late any more (Naotsuka et al., 1981).

The Japanese language is particularly well-suited to the type of indirection that the Japanese use. For example, in English, possible answers to certain questions can be limited to "yes" or "no." In Japanese, it is possible to choose neither (Matsumoto, 1976: 26-27).

Hierarchy

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Japanese

society is characterized as being vertical, that is, hierarchical. Every person has a position in the group determined by age, sex, economic and social position, educational background, and so on. Positions are emphasized by the frequent use of titles, such as buchō [section head or manager] or kaichō [president of a company] as terms of address in preference to names.

In Japan, the position of group leader is particularly important. If the group was formed by a certain person, that person may take the position of leader, or the leader may be appointed by someone outside the group. If not, the group's first order of business is to choose a leader. The leader may be chosen by vote or by consensus. If the leader is chosen by consensus, this may be a long process, since it is considered polite to denigrate one's own fitness to be leader.

Other than the position of leader, roles and obligations may not be explicitly defined and designated in Japanese groups. Group members may meet to work together rather than assigning tasks for members to do outside of the meeting.

In any communication situation in Japan, it is important for the speaker and hearer to be aware of their relative positions. In the Japanese language, there are many ways for speakers to express their positions relative to that of the hearer. It is important to choose the correct grammatical structures, lexical items and methods of communication to reflect this relationship. It is modest to place oneself in a lower position than that of the hearer. Assuming an equal position with a person of a higher or lower position is impolite.

In Japanese society, those in a superior position in a group are expected to take care of the needs of subordinates. For

example, in a family, parents are expected to be responsible for finding spouses for their children. In a company, an employer often helps with or even solves personal problems of employees. By the same token, superiors are responsible for their subordinates' mistakes. After the crash of JAL Flight 123 in 1985, the president of Japan Airlines offered to resign from his job, though his actions did not directly contribute to the crash.

Characteristics of American Groups

The Individual vs. the Group

Americans consider the individual more important than the group. Individual rights are emphasized more. Therefore, a person may enter a group when it suits his/her purpose, but is likely to leave if these goals change or are not being met (Stewart, 1972). Most universities are easy to enter in comparison with Japanese universities, and it is not at all unusual for students to transfer from one university to another during the course of their undergraduate work. In fact, some students transfer more than once. While, of course, American employers are careful about whom they hire, they do not expect their workers to stay with the same company for their entire working lives. American employees generally feel free to change companies if it seems to be in their best interest to do so.

Americans have a tendency to keep the various groups that they belong to separate. A group formed for one purpose serves mainly that one purpose. Any other purpose it serves in addition is incidental and usually minor, or at least informal. While co-workers may become friendly, many of an employee's social contacts are likely to be with people outside of the company.

(Lanier, 1981).

Even within a group, Americans want to maintain a certain amount of individuality, or at least they want to be able to treasure the illusion of individuality (Stewart, 1972). They don't necessarily want to be like all of the other group members. Americans generally prefer not to wear uniforms, and even professions that have traditionally worn uniforms, such as nurses, are getting away from the practice in some circumstances.

Harmony and Decision Making

While Americans value group harmony, they define it differently than Japanese people do. Harmony does not necessarily mean that there is no disagreement; it means that all group members are free to express their own opinions, whether or not they agree with the opinions of others. This does not mean that there is not effort to soften the tone of disagreement. For example, one group member does not disagree with another by saying, "You're wrong." Expressions like "I see what you mean, but..." or "You have a good point there, but have you considered..." are used to express disagreement. Rather than attempting to reach a consensus, decisions are made by authorized people or by a vote, though compromise may have some role in the decision-making process.

Group Hierarchy

American society is sometimes described as horizontal. Americans see all people as being equal, at least in theory. Groups generally have a leader, either one who is formally appointed or elected or one who had taken a leadership role for some other reason. A leader may emerge gradually as the group

goes about its tasks by virtue of particular expertise, personality traits, etc. Groups may have little formal structure beyond that. However, tasks are assigned explicitly and often carried out outside of group meetings.

In spite of the fact that American groups are likely to be less hierarchical than Japanese groups, American society is not completely horizontal. There are grammatical distinctions between, for example, requests made of a superior and those made of a subordinate. However, relative position is a less important aspect of relationships in the United States than it is in Japan.

American groups vary widely in the importance they place on the position of leader, and on how that leader is chosen. As with a Japanese group, the leader may be the person who formed the group, or may be appointed by someone outside the group. The group leader may be elected or arrived at by consensus. In some cases, there is no official leader.

In the United States, superiors do not have the responsibilities toward their subordinates that are expected in Japanese society. Just as American parents do not have the responsibility of finding spouses for their children, American employees do not expect their employers to help them with personal problems. Superiors also have less responsibility for a subordinate's wrong-doing, unless there is some direct relationship between the superior and the subordinate's actions.

In keeping with the separation of different types of groups, superiors in American groups do not necessarily help subordinates with personal problems. It is generally considered inappropriate to "bring one's personal problems to work," except to the extent that a supervisor might, for example, help arrange a leave of absence if one is necessary for taking care of personal business.

The differences in attitudes toward the group and in communication styles in the group causes many problems in relationships between Americans and Japanese. In this section, I would like to discuss some of those problems.

Decision Making

The difference between American and Japanese ways of group decision making may cause some problems when Americans and Japanese work together. Americans often find the process of reaching a consensus slow, frustrating and difficult to understand. However, trying to circumvent the process will cause serious problems. In addition, once a consensus is reached, the decision is carried out swiftly, with no foot-dragging by group members who were not consulted in making the decision, as may easily happen in an American company (Naotsuka et al., 1981).

As mentioned above, one reason that Japanese people communicate well among themselves is that Japan is relatively homogeneous. Unfortunately, the cues that serve them well when communicating among themselves do not work when communicating with non-Japanese people. Most Japanese have few opportunities to meet people from other countries. They seldom encounter foreign culture in Japan, so they are not accustomed to differentiating between communication with Japanese and with non-Japanese people. They often experience culture shock when they meet people from other cultures. They may try to apply the only strategies they know for communicating, those that they use with other Japanese, such as indirection and silences, to communication with non-Japanese people (Kunihiro, 1972). This

generally does not work with Americans, who are accustomed to communicating more explicitly (Matsumoto, 1976), and this makes it difficult for Japanese to adjust to working with people from other countries (Nakane, 1972).

Indirectness of Expression

Another problem is that Americans may have difficulty understanding what a Japanese speaker means when he/she uses indirect expressions. Indirect expressions may be used to complain, to refuse, and generally to tell hearers anything that they do not want to hear. In fact, speakers may say the opposite of what they intend to express. Therefore, a great sensitivity to the meaning of silence, the context, and the nuances of the situation is necessary. This type of problem is not unusual between Americans and Japanese, especially in a group setting, since not only what is actually said but what is not said and silences are both important.

The following dialogue (Naotsuka et al., 1981: 192) illustrates the Japanese way of saying "no." Though it does not involve a group context, it illustrates clearly the problems that might arise in such a case. In this dialogue, Mr. F, a foreign businessman, and Mr. J, a Japanese businessman. Mr. F is trying to find out whether Mr. J's company has decided to go ahead with business talks between the two companies or drop the negotiations. Mr. J seems to know what his company has decided but is reluctant to give a clear answer.

Mr. F: I wish to know your decision.

Mr. J: Would you like to have a cup of tea?

Mr. F: Oh, thank you very much. What is your answer?

Mr. J: Oh...Let me see...By the way, can I ask you how many people are employed in your office?

Mr. F: I want to have a definite answer from you now.

Mr. J: It is terribly difficult for me to answer you now.

I'll go and ask Mr. T. I'll be back soon. Please excuse me. (After about twenty minutes, he comes back.) How about tea? Won't you have some more tea?

Mr. F: Thanks. What did Mr. T say? What is his opinion?

Mr. J: I'm awfully sorry, Mr. T has taken the day off.

As a speaker, an American may use direct expressions and offend the Japanese hearer. A Japanese, on the other hand, does not like to express an opinion directly, especially if it disagrees with the hearer's opinion. This may make Americans feel that the Japanese is not taking an active part in the group. In one case, a Japanese member of a discussion group at a university responded to statements that she disagreed with silence, in order to express her disapproval. When someone said something that she agreed with, she did not respond, because her opinion had already been expressed. (Other Japanese people would have been able to understand from her non-verbal signals whether her silence indicated disapproval or agreement.) Naturally (from their point of view), the American students became angry with her for her lack of participation.

Stability

While Japanese groups are generally stable, Americans, as individualists, usually prefer to retain the right to join or leave a group (Stewart, 1972). For example, Americans move from one company to another more readily than Japanese do, and

Japanese companies make a greater effort to avoid laying workers off than American companies do. This may cause problems when American companies hire Japanese employees or vice versa.

Hierarchy

The hierarchical nature of groups in Japan, in contrast to the equalitarian nature of groups in the US can cause many problems in relationships between Americans and Japanese. For an American, it may not show enough sensitivity to the hierarchy and therefore may unintentionally offend other group members. A Japanese, on the other hand, may be too conscious of hierarchical differences and therefore may be hesitant to assert opinions, make requests, etc., even when it would be appropriate. This may be misinterpreted by an employer or teacher as lack of interest, not having an opinion on one's own, etc.

The opposite problem is also possible. If a Japanese observes, for example, that American employees use a supervisor's first name, the Japanese might assume that the employees do not defer in other ways. Therefore, the Japanese employee might act too familiar with the employer or seem too pushy.

Assignment of Tasks

Since tasks are not usually explicitly assigned in Japanese groups, Americans may have difficulty understanding what is expected of them. They may either do a task that they are not expected to do or fail to do something that other group members expected of them.

Purposes of the Groups

The fact that Japanese groups are intended to fulfill more

than one function may cause misunderstandings between Americans and Japanese. Members of the same department or club in a company not only work together but socialize. Personal or family excuses are not acceptable, as they would be in an American setting. This is something that foreign wives of Japanese company employees often complain about. Their husbands often spend evenings socializing with members of their department rather than coming home, even for important family occasions such as anniversaries or children's birthdays. It is difficult for an American wife to understand the importance that this socializing has to group cohesiveness in Japan.

Suggestions for Cross-Cultural Communication

The differences that Japanese and Americans have in their attitudes toward the group may cause many problems in intercultural communication. Though these problems are not insurmountable, the solutions to them are not necessarily simple. Below, I would like to make some suggestions that I believe would make this interaction easier.

The first and most obvious suggestion--and yet, it seems, sometimes the least employed, even by people who should recognize its importance (Gibney, 1975)--is that Americans and Japanese who have contact with one another should learn as much as possible about one another's attitudes, values, and behavior. This includes not only information about what communication behavior is expected in a given situation but how those behaviors fit logically into the pattern of the culture as a whole, and an openness and appreciation for that pattern. It is easy, for example, for Americans to criticize the amount of time that the

Japanese decision-making process takes, without recognizing that it is closely related to the emphasis that a people with dense population patterns put on group harmony, or the amount of time saved in the process of carrying out a decision when all of the people involved in carrying out the decision have agreed to it before it was made (Naotsuka et al., 1981).

Americans should recognize that, as mentioned above, arriving at a consensus plays an important role in Japanese society and makes the carrying out of the decision smoother than "majority rule" might. Americans should be patient with this process and try to participate in it. While the group is attempting to arrive at a consensus, Americans should not strongly assert their own opinions but try to figure out what most of the group members think. In disagreeing with the opinion of most of the other group members, he/she should hint at this opinion without expressing it strongly. He/she should not directly ask another group member for an opinion. It is by carefully listening to the general discussion that one figures out who holds which opinions.

Japanese members of a predominantly American group, on the other hand, should make an effort to express their own opinions during the discussion process, even though this may be uncomfortable. It is important to consider various aspects of a decision before making the decision, and other group members will not usually think well of a member who does not participate and help with this process. If American group members really want to get the opinion of a Japanese member who may not feel comfortable asserting an opinion, it may be best to discuss the issue in general terms and give that person a chance to become comfortable in expressing an opinion.

In any situation that involves telling Japanese hearers something that they would not like to hear, whether it is a refusal or a complaint, it is important to do so indirectly in order to avoid offense.

Japanese people working with Americans, on the other hand, must learn to speak more directly than they are accustomed to doing in Japanese. At the same time, they must recognize that this does not mean that complaints, refusals, etc., can be stated baldly; English has certain expressions used to soften these functions.

Both Americans and Japanese should be aware of the differences in their attitudes toward the hierarchy of the group. Since Japanese put a great deal of emphasis on the relative status of group members, Americans should be aware of these differences and act accordingly. Japanese people should realize that Americans put less emphasis on the hierarchy, though certain types of deference are important. It is best to observe how American group members behave and imitate them, for example, whether they use their supervisor's first name or how they go about disagreeing with him/her.

Since tasks are not explicitly assigned in Japanese groups, American members should be careful to clarify their tasks, if they are not sure of what is expected of them. This can be done by asking questions of other group members.

When working with a Japanese group, Americans need to realize that belonging to that group may include more obligations (as well as benefits) than those the main task entail. While in an American group, other members would understand if, for example, one member could not go to a bar for a drink after the meeting due to a family obligation, other group members would

most likely understand. In a Japanese group, however, such excuses are not really acceptable. Americans should recognize that this socializing is an important part of the role of group member.

This is obviously not an exhaustive list of suggestions for Americans and Japanese working together in groups. Other guidelines could be suggested.

Conclusion

The relationship between Japan and the United States is a very important one. This contact takes place in many areas, including business, government, tourism and education. It is therefore important that Japanese and Americans strive to understand each other's patterns of communication. One very important area is that of attitudes toward groups. Understanding these attitudes and having guidelines as to how to interact in groups will improve the communication between Americans and Japanese.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Christopher, R. (1983). The Japanese mind. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Cleaver, C. G. (1976). Japanese and Americans: Cultural parallels and paradoxes. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gibney, F. (1975). Japan: The fragile superpower. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.
- Gould, R. (1972). Japan alone. Japan Quarterly, 19(1).
- Harris, P. R. (1979). Managing cultural differences. Houston, Texas: Gulf Publishing.
- Hazama, H. (1982). Historical overview of cultural supposition in Japanese business management. The East, 18(11, 12), 53-63.
- Irokawa, D. (1973). Japan's grass-roots tradition: Current issues in the mirror of history. Japan Quarterly, 20(1).
- Katō, S. (1974). Reconstruction of the Japanese group. Japan Quarterly, 21, 28-35.
- Kindaichi, H. (1957). Nihongo [Japanese Language] Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- Kunihiro, M. (1972). US-Japan communication. In H. Rosovsky (Ed.), Discord in the Pacific: Challenges to the Japanese-American alliance (pp. 155-172). Washington, D.C.: Columbus Books. ... p. 157.
- Lanier, A. R. (1981). Living in the U.S.A. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press.
- Matsumoto, M. (1976). Eigo-no motsu ronri [Logic in English]. Eigo Kyōiku 25(1), 25-27.
- Nakane, C. (1972). Tekiō-no iōken [Conditions of adjustment]. Tokyo: Kodansha.

- Naotsuka, R., Sakamoto, N., Hirose, T., Hagiwara, H., Ohta, J.,
Maeda, S., Hara, T., Iwasaki, K. (1981). Mutual understanding
of different cultures, Tokyo: Taishukan.
- Reischauer, E. O. (1977). The Japanese. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle
Co. . . , p. 128,
- Stewart, E. C. (1972). American cultural patterns: A cross-
cultural perspective. Chicago: Intercultural Press.
- Stewart, E. C. (1979). American assumptions and values:
Orientation to action. In E. C. Smith and L. F. Luce (Eds.),
Toward internationalism: Readings in cross-cultural
communication (pp. 1-22). Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury
House.